

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (currently amended) A retractor blade assembly comprising:
 - a fixed blade having a tissue ~~retracting engaging~~ segment extending along a longitudinal axis; and
 - an adjustable blade operatively coupled to the fixed blade and linearly adjustable relative to the fixed blade parallel to ~~along~~ the longitudinal axis of the tissue ~~retracting engaging~~ segment of the fixed blade, the adjustable blade including a flexible tab, the flexible tab being movable between a first position in which the tab is generally co-planar to the adjustable blade and a second position in which the tab is oriented generally transverse to the adjustable blade.
2. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 1, wherein the flexible tab is biased to the first position.
3. (Original) The retractor blade assemble of claim 2, wherein the flexible tab is generally rectilinear is shape.
4. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 3, wherein a distal portion of the flexible tab is coupled to and formed from the adjustable blade.
5. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 4, wherein the flexible tab is pivotable about the distal portion between the first and second positions.
6. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 1, wherein the flexible tab is configured to move away from the fixed blade when moved to the second position.
7. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 1, wherein the flexible tab includes a projection for engaging the fixed blade when the tab is in the first position.

8. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 7, wherein the fixed blade includes a plurality of stops for receiving the projection.

9. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 8, wherein the stops comprise a plurality of detents aligned longitudinally along the fixed blade.

10. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 8, wherein the stops comprise a plurality of teeth aligned longitudinally along the fixed blade.

11. (currently amended) A retractor blade assembly comprising:

a fixed blade having a tissue retracting ~~engaging~~ segment extending along a longitudinal axis; and

an adjustable blade operatively coupled to the fixed blade and linearly adjustable relative to the fixed blade parallel to ~~along~~ the longitudinal axis of the tissue retracting ~~engaging~~ segment of the fixed blade, the adjustable blade including a flexible tab, the flexible tab being pivotable between a first position, in which the tab is generally co-planar to the adjustable blade, to a second position, in which the tab is oriented generally transverse to the adjustable blade, the flexible tab having a projection engageable with one or more longitudinally aligned stops provided on the fixed blade, the projection engaging a stop when the tab is the first position to fix the adjustable blade relative to the fixed blade, the tab including a proximally facing instrument engagement surface to facilitate adjustment of the adjustable blade relative to the fixed blade.

12. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 11, wherein the adjustable blade includes an opening adjacent the instrument engagement surface to facilitate positioning of an instrument against the instrument engagement surface.

13. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 12, wherein the opening is sized to receive the distal end of an instrument for adjustment of the adjustable blade relative to the fixed blade.

14. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 12, wherein the opening is positioned proximal to the instrument engagement surface.

15. (Original) The retractor blade assembly of claim 11, wherein the instrument engagement surface is oriented generally perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the fixed blade.

16. (currently amended) A retractor blade assembly comprising:

a fixed blade having a tissue retracting ~~engaging~~ segment extending along a longitudinal axis; and

an adjustable blade operatively coupled to the fixed blade and linearly adjustable relative to the fixed blade parallel to ~~along~~ the longitudinal axis of the tissue retracting ~~engaging~~ segment of the fixed blade, the adjustable blade including a flexible tab formed from the adjustable blade and having a distal end coupled to the adjustable blade, a proximal end of the flexible tab being pivotable about the distal end between a first position, in which the tab is generally co-planar to the adjustable blade, to a second position, in which the tab is oriented generally transverse to the adjustable blade, the flexible tab being biased to the first position and having a projection engageable with one or more longitudinally aligned stops provided on the fixed blade, the projection engaging a stop when the tab is the first position to fix the adjustable blade relative to the fixed blade, the proximal end of the tab including a proximally facing instrument engagement surface and the adjustable blade including an opening proximally adjacent the instrument engagement surface to facilitate positioning of an instrument against the instrument engagement surface.

17. (Withdrawn) An instrument for adjusting an adjustable blade of a retractor blade assembly, the instrument comprising:

a handle, and an instrument body coupled to the handle, the instrument body including a distal end having a distal facing notch formed therein, the notch being defined by a first surface and a second surface, the second surface being angled proximally toward the first surface, wherein the notch is sized to receive a portion of the adjustable blade between the first surface and the second surface.

18. (Withdrawn) The instrument of claim 17, wherein the notch has a third surface interposed between and connecting the first and second surfaces.

19. (Withdrawn) The instrument of claim 18, wherein the third surface is arcuate in shape.

20. (Withdrawn) The instrument of claim 18, wherein the third surface is oriented generally perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the instrument body.

21. (Withdrawn) The instrument of claim 17, wherein the instrument body includes a cut-out formed therein, the cut-out being positioned proximal to the notch and being sized to receive another portion of the adjustable blade therein.

22. (Withdrawn) An instrument for adjusting an adjustable blade of a retractor blade assembly, the instrument comprising:

a handle, and an instrument body coupled to the handle, the instrument body having a top surface, a bottom surface and a distal end, the distal end having a distal facing notch formed therein, the notch being defined by a first surface and a second surface, the second surface being angled proximally from the bottom surface of the instrument body toward the first surface, the notch being sized to receive a portion of the adjustable blade between the first surface and the second surface, the bottom surface of the instrument body including a cut-out formed therein, the cut-out being positioned proximal to the notch and being sized to receive another portion of the adjustable blade therein.

23. (Withdrawn) A retractor blade assembly comprising:

a fixed blade having a longitudinal axis;

an adjustable blade operatively coupled to the fixed blade and adjustable relative to the fixed blade along the longitudinal axis of the fixed blade; and a flexible sheath coupled at one portion to the fixed blade and at a second portion to the adjustable blade.

24. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 23, wherein adjustable blade has an inner surface and an outer surface and the flexible sheath is coupled to the outer surface.

25. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 24, wherein the flexible sheath is coupled to the inner surface and the outer surface.

26. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 23, wherein the flexible sheath is expandable from a generally collapsed configuration to an expanded configuration upon adjustment of the adjustable blade in a distal direction relative to the fixed blade.

27. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 26, wherein the sheath, in the expanded configuration, is generally tubular in shape.

28. (Withdrawn) A retractor blade assembly comprising:

a fixed blade having a longitudinal axis; and

a plurality of adjustable blades operatively coupled to the fixed blade and adjustable relative to the fixed blade along the longitudinal axis of the fixed blade between a proximal position and a distal position, the plurality of adjustable blades including one or more laterally adjustable blades that are adjustable relative to one another in a direction transverse to the longitudinal axis of the fixed blade when the plurality of adjustable blades are adjusted to a distal position.

29. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 28, wherein the laterally adjustable blades are interconnected at a pivot point.

30. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 29, wherein the laterally adjustable blades are pivotable about the pivot point from a collapsed position, in which the longitudinal axis of each laterally adjustable blade is oriented approximately parallel to the longitudinal axis of the fixed blade, to an expanded position, in which the longitudinal axis of each laterally adjustable blade is oriented at an angle to the longitudinal axis of the fixed blade.

31. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 30, wherein the laterally adjustable blades are biased to the expanded position.

32. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 31, further comprising a torsion spring coupled to the laterally adjustable blade to bias the laterally adjustable blades to the expanded position.

33. (Withdrawn) The retractor blade assembly of claim 28, wherein the fixed blade includes a pair of spaced apart channels, each of the channels receiving a rail provided on the adjustable blade.